DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 409 952 JC 970 416

AUTHOR	Cohen, Arthur M.; Sanchez, Jorge R.
TITLE	The Transfer Rate: A Model of Consistency.
INSTITUTION	Center for the Study of Community Colleges, Los Angeles, Calif.
PUB DATE	[Jul 97]
NOTE	13p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*College Outcomes Assessment; *College Transfer Students; Community Colleges; Data Collection; *Definitions; National Surveys; *Research Utilization; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS	*Transfer Assembly; *Transfer Rates (College)

ABSTRACT

In 1989, the Transfer Assembly project was initiated by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges (CSCC) to determine the contribution of community colleges to students' progress towards baccalaureate degrees. In that year, 48 community colleges provided data on students, with transfers defined as students with no prior college experience who complete at least 12 units and begin coursework at a public, in-state four-year college or university within 4 years. In 1992, the project began seeking data from state higher education agencies and university systems, as well as from individual colleges. By 1994, 20 states and over 400 institutions were represented annually in the analysis. Over the 8 years of its existence, the Transfer Assembly has been notable in the consistency of its findings, with approximately one-fifth of community college students found to be transfers each year. In 1996, CSCC gathered data on 543,055 students at 416 colleges who had started their education in 1990, again finding that 21.8% of these students had transferred by fall 1994. The Transfer Assembly has inspired research efforts and programmatic changes at community colleges and college systems. In addition, several major newspapers have accorded recognition to the project's transfer rate. The consistency of the Transfer Assembly-derived rate and its use within the field attest to the importance of a valid and reliable indicator of student outcomes. (HAA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 409 952

The Transfer Rate: A Model of Consistency

Arthur M. Cohen
Jorge R. Sanchez

Center for the Study of Community Colleges

JC 970 416

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

A. M. Cohen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The Transfer Rate: A Model of Consistency

Arthur M. Cohen and Jorge R. Sanchez
University of California, Los Angeles

"More than one-fifth of the nation's community college students who begin their studies at a community college and complete a minimum of 12 credit units transfer to an in-state public four-year college or university." That statement has appeared in published journal articles, local newspapers, and scholarly monographs since the first Transfer Assembly results emerged in 1990. Researchers who track the flow of community college students to four-year colleges and universities have come to rely on this measure as one indicator of community college outcomes.

Over the last eight years, the consistency in the transfer rate has been one of the most notable findings of The Ford Foundation funded Transfer Assembly. The Center for the Study of Community Colleges (CSCC) set out to define an agreeable way of calculating transfer rate that could be applied across the nation and to encourage colleges, universities, and state agencies to report data according to the firmly incorporated definition. The overall intent was to create a consistent way of estimating the community colleges' contribution to students' progress toward the baccalaureate degree.

Transfer Assembly's Transfer Rate Definition

The definition employed by the Transfer Assembly for calculating transfer was developed after widespread consultation and agreement that the definition should be valid, easily understandable, and based on data that are readily obtainable. The result was a simple measure, i.e., a percentage, which would become known as the transfer rate. This measure would be the number of students who enrolled at a community college, subdivided according to certain

criteria, divided into the number who subsequently matriculated at a four-year college or university.

Operationally, the Transfer Assembly defines the transfer rate as: *all students entering the community college in a given year who have no prior college experience and who complete at least 12 college-credit units within four years, divided into the number of that group who take one or more classes at a public, in-state university or college within four years.* The simplicity of this measure drew immediate applause and criticism simultaneously. Critics were quick to point out that the Transfer Assembly definition would require a four- to five-year wait to determine results and the model excluded out-of-state transfer, and transfers to private four-year colleges and universities. It also failed to account for students who took longer than four years to transfer and it ignored student aspirations or type of program in which they enrolled. On the other hand, proponents of the definition held that existing data bases could be used for the calculations, that aspirations and program followed are not assessed uniformly. Furthermore, results would be forthcoming yearly, the model eliminated students with prior higher education experience, and, in general it would be relatively easy for anyone to understand the measure.

Transfer Assembly Methodology

The staff of the Center for the Study of Community Colleges (CSCC) began the project by inviting a sample of the nation's community colleges to participate in the first Transfer Assembly. Initially, the 240 colleges with at least 25 percent minority enrollment made up the invitation list. The first round in 1989 found 48 of the invited institutions able to provide the data on the students who had entered their college in 1984 as first time students with no prior college experience and who had begun coursework at a four-year college or university by 1989.

In the following year, the same 240 community colleges were again asked to provide the data, this time on their 1985 entrants; 114 colleges participated. The 1991 sample of colleges invited was expanded, and 155 participated.

In 1992, the Transfer Assembly began seeking data from state higher education agencies and university system, as well as from individual colleges. This broader approach to soliciting the requisite information proved more fruitful. Yearly, since 1994, 20 states and over 400 community colleges that enroll more than half of all first-time community college entrants have been represented in the analysis. The increased number of community colleges reporting transfer data has led to a substantial increase in the number of students tracked: over 500,000 annually. Most of the states with large community college populations participate in the study: California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York (SUNY), North Carolina, Oklahoma, Texas, Washington, West Virginia.

Table 1

National Transfer Assembly Transfer Rates for Participating Colleges
1984 to 1991 Transfer Assembly Cohort Years

Transfer Assembly Project Year	Number of Participating Colleges	Study Cohort Year	Students Entered First Time	Percent 12 or more Credits/Units	Percent Transferring Within 4 Years
1990	48	1984	77,903	50.5	23.7
1991	114	1985	191,748	46.7	23.6
1992	155	1986	267,150	46.7	23.4
1993	366	1987	507,757	46.9	22.6
1994	395	1988	522,758	45.5	22.1
1995	416	1989	511,996	46.1	21.5
1996	416	1990	543,055	47.1	21.8
1997	419	1991	560,000	Data collection in progress	

1996 Transfer Assembly Results

For 1996, CSCC gathered data on more than 540,000 students. Of those who started their collegiate education at a community college in 1990, 47.1 percent or 255,811 completed at least four courses (12 credits/units). By the fall of 1994, more than 62,000 of this group had transferred to a four-year in-state college or university. This yields a transfer rate of 21.8. Over the last four years the rate has not fluctuated more than 1.1 percent. State transfer rates range from 10 to 40 percent, whereas individual college rates have been as low as 3 percent and as high as 67 percent. These results are similar to previous years' results and affirm the stability of both the community college student population and the institutional practices and procedures that promote transfer to four-year institutions.

College Inspired Transfer Rate Efforts

Transfer Assembly efforts have inspired other community college initiated research studies and programmatic changes related to understanding the community college to four-year college/university transfer process. In Southern California, one community college president has seized on the Transfer Assembly data to establish a multi-year project to increase the college's transfer rate. Called the "President's Emphasis on Transfer" (PET) the president has launched a collegewide effort in association with several receiving four-year colleges and universities in the area. The Transfer Assembly transfer rate would be monitored to determine the success of this endeavor.

Other community colleges in California publish the Transfer Assembly transfer rate along side other derived transfer rates. San Diego, Glendale, Los Rios and Coast Community College Districts routinely disseminate the Transfer Assembly transfer rate in their college

'Factbooks' and research findings as a reliable measure of transfer. The information super highway has not escaped the presence of Transfer Assembly results. Through the Internet, one can access De Anza College's web pages proudly highlighting their transfer rate, according to the CSCC Transfer Assembly study.

As part of the Illinois Community College Board's (ICCB) cost-effectiveness and accountability initiatives, the Board identified the tracking of community college student outcomes as a priority for its system. The ICCB undertook a study to examine two national models that calculated transfer rates. The Transfer Assembly model was identified as one of the national models. Results from the Transfer Assembly yielded higher transfer rates across student types than the other model. The model's consistency and high reliability were cited as reasons to continue providing data to the CSCC for future study.

Local Media Uses

Several major newspapers have also accorded recognition of the Transfer Assembly's transfer rate. The Los Angeles Times, the Philadelphia Inquirer, the Seattle Times and the San Francisco Examiner have presented Transfer Assembly-derived transfer rate results to their local communities. National and state transfer rates are requested frequently and inquiries for specific college results are referred to the individual college. The publication of transfer rate information by local media affirms regional interest and accountability.

Yearly results of the Transfer Assembly are also reported in the Community College Times and Community College Week. These nationally distributed, independent newspapers serve community college constituent audiences and support the continuance of national research studies that promote the vitality of community college experience.

Southern Regional Education Board (SREB)

In their report, "Helping Students Who Transfer From Two-year to Four-year Colleges," the SREB emphasized the need to use a stable, consistent, and proven definition of transfer in order to assess the effectiveness of the two-year, transfer-oriented programs. They supported the use of the established definition used in the Transfer Assembly computation of the transfer rate. SREB reported, "Based on the Center's definition, transfer rates for SREB states that provided data average 18 percent and ranged from 16 to 30 percent." They recommended that other colleges in the SREB region contribute their data to the Transfer Assembly study.

NECS: Indicator of the Month, September 1996

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has adopted the definition and applied it to the 1990 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up data. NCES found results similar to those of the Transfer Assembly. Its Indicator of the Month, release for September 1996, reported, "nineteen percent of 1989-90 community college beginners transferred to a public four-year institution." This application of the transfer rate to a deferent data base affirms its reliability.

State Commissions and Governing Boards

Kentucky's Legislative Research Commission - Education Committee, Pennsylvania's Higher Education Inter-segmental Council, and California's Inter-segmental Coordinating Committee have contacted the Center requesting national and state transfer rates. These states are looking into efforts to enhance community college student transfer. The California Community College Chancellor's Office is considering incorporating the Transfer Assembly

transfer rate in its annual performance reports and seeking a way of matching community college students to private four-year college and universities in the state. Several states in the Transfer Assembly study report the transfer data by centrally calculating the student tracking from a centralized data system.

Summary

The Transfer Assembly set out to answer the question, What is the community colleges' contribution to their students' progress towards the baccalaureate? The project has reaffirmed over the past eight years that about 22 percent of the students who began their postsecondary studies at a community college and complete at least four credit courses there enroll in a public in-state four-year college or university within four years. These consistent findings demonstrate that the colleges are effectively serving as the point of entry for a sizable percentage of the entrants.

The transfer rate of 22 percent actually understates the community colleges' contributions. Few states have accessible data bases tracking students in private institutions. An estimate based on partial data suggests that the national rate would be at 25 or 26 percent, if the private universities were included. The four-year limitation also leads to an undercount; many students take five or more years to make the move. However, the data set must be cut off somewhere and since community college matriculants are potential transfers until they either show up at a university or die, a time-to-transfer that captures most of them seems reasonable. The four-year figure also allows a college to plot the effects of its major program modifications.

The consistency of the Transfer Assembly-derived transfer-rate definition and its use within the community college community attest to the importance of a valid and reliable indicator of student outcomes. Researchers are too often ready to abandon a study after a year or two. Administrators and community college advocates need to have confidence in efforts like the Transfer Assembly. Local application of a college's transfer rate is an important testament that this information is useful. Regional use of the transfer data suggests that colleges are willing to compare themselves to others and attract students who seek an outcome-oriented environment.

When Center staff members present the data at conferences or respond to calls from journalists, they are often asked, "Does the transfer rate indicate that the community colleges are doing a good job?" The answer is that each year around 125,000 students who might not otherwise have been able to enter four-year colleges or universities have been assisted toward the baccalaureate. That looks like one indicator of institutional worth.

References

Cohen, A. M. and Brawer, F. B. (1996) *The President's Pet: Transfer-Related Activities and Attitudes at Cerritos College*. Center for the Study of Community Colleges, Los Angeles, CA. ED398971.

Creech, J. D. (1995) *Helping Students Who Transfer from Two-Year to Four-Year Colleges*. Southern Regional Education Board, Atlanta, GA. ERIC Doc. ED379015.

Illinois Community Coll. Board. (1994) *Calculating Transfer Rates: Examining Two National Models in Illinois*. Illinois Community College Board, Springfield, IL. ERIC Doc. ED365380.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (1996) *Indicator of the Month, September 1996: Community college outcomes*. NCES 96-920, by Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (1996) *The Condition of Education 1996*. NCES 96-304, by Thomas M. Smith (ed.), Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Authors

Dr. Arthur M. Cohen
President, Center for the Study of Community Colleges
Professor, Higher Education
Graduate School of Education and Information Studies
University of California, Los Angeles

Jorge R. Sanchez
Director, Vocational Education and Institutional Research
Coast Community College District
Doctoral Student, Higher Education
Graduate School of Education and Information Studies
University of California, Los Angeles